



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE, WESTERN UNION LAUNCH PARTNERSHIP FOR NEW SEVIS PAYMENT METHOD

Will Facilitate Fee Payment For International Students, Exchange Visitors In Local Currency

WASHINGTON – Paying the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee in local currency is now possible, thanks to a new program announced this month by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Western Union.

The new fee payment method, which became available November 1, makes it possible for non-immigrant students and exchange visitors around the world to pay the fee, which is used to support SEVIS, in their home countries' currencies using the Western Union Quick Pay™ service.

SEVIS, the Web-based system for collecting and maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors in the United States, is administered by ICE, the largest investigative agency in DHS.

The SEVIS fee – in most cases, \$100 – is mandated by Congress and was instituted on September 1, 2004. The fee applies to F, J and M non-immigrant visa classifications and is used to cover the costs of maintaining SEVIS and to provide assistance and technical support for SEVIS users.

There are currently several methods of payment for the SEVIS fee: Internet payments via debit or credit card; checks or money orders drawn on a U.S. account; third-party payments; and bulk-filing payments for certain exchange visitor program sponsors. The Western Union fee payment method presents an additional, more convenient option to students and exchange visitors wishing to pay in their local currency.

Under this new payment initiative, Western Union collects the SEVIS fee, in local currency, along with the student or exchange student's required registration data and transmits the payment and data to ICE. The properly completed Western Union receipt serves as immediate proof-of-payment for a visa interview at a U.S. consulate and for admission at a U.S. port of entry. This option is available in any country where Western Union offers its Quick Pay™ service – currently more than 130 nations nationwide.

There have been 11 other significant enhancements to SEVIS since August 2003, when registration in the system was required for foreign students, exchange visitors and academic institutions. These technical and procedural adjustments, made at the request of the academic community, have improved inquiry response time from an average of 7 minutes to 97 seconds.

For these improvements, SEVIS was one of only 15 government entities recognized by the E-Gov institute with the 2004 Pioneer Award. This recognition was for SEVIS' overall improvement in operations and streamlined processes.

The SEVIS system was deployed after the 9/11 attacks as part of the effort to restore integrity to the U.S. immigration system. SEVIS has simplified what was once a manual process, resulting in more accurate and timely data, faster processing and fewer delays for students and exchange visitors.

Currently, more than 770,000 students and exchange visitors are active in SEVIS at over 9,000 approved/designated schools and program sponsors nationwide. From August 2003 through August 2004, SEVIS recorded a slight increase in the foreign student population studying in the United States, from 605,000 to 640,000.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).